

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is distracted driving?

There are three main types of distraction:

VISUAL — taking your eyes off the road

MANUAL — taking your hands off the wheel

COGNITIVE — taking your mind off what you're doing

Distracted driving is any non-driving activity a person engages in while operating a motor vehicle. Such activities have the potential to distract the person from the primary task of driving and increase the risk of crashing.

2. Why do people do it?

There are many reasons for distracted driving, including busy lifestyles, stressful jobs, and the presence of children and pets in the car. Many people use technology such as cell phones, Blackberrys, and other electronic devices as their main means of communication. They forget to put these devices down when they should be paying the closest attention to their driving for the sake of their own safety and that of others.

3. Who are the offenders, and how great a problem is this?

Everyone is guilty to a certain extent. The youngest Americans are most at risk, but they are not alone. At any given moment during the daylight hours, over 800,000 vehicles are being driven by someone using a hand-held cell phone. People of all ages are using a variety of

hand-held devices, such as cell phones, mp3 players, personal digital assistants, and navigation devices, when they are behind the wheel.

4. Is it safe to use hands-free (headset, speakerphone, or other device) cell phones while driving?

The available research indicates that whether it is a hands-free or hand-held device, the cognitive distraction is significant enough to degrade a driver's performance. The driver is more likely to miss key visual and audio cues needed to avoid a crash.

5. Is talking on a cell phone any worse than having a conversation with someone in the car?

Some research findings show both activities to be equally risky, while others show cell phone use to be more risky. A significant difference between the two is the fact that a passenger can monitor the driving situation along with the driver and pause for, or alert the driver to, potential hazards, whereas a person on the other end of the phone line is unaware of the roadway situation.

6. What, if anything, is NHTSA doing to try to combat this problem?

NHTSA is conducting research projects on driver cell phone use and will continue to monitor the research of others on this subject. As we learn more and as wireless technologies evolve and expand, NHTSA will make its findings public.

NHTSA is encouraging state and local government partners to reduce fatalities and crashes by identifying ways that states can address distracted driving in their Strategic Highway Safety Plans. Our state and local partners are keys to any success we will have in addressing distracted driving.

States can take some steps immediately to reduce the risks of distracted driving. One example is installing rumble strips along roads to get the attention of distracted drivers before they deviate from their lane.

7. How do the states deal with this problem?

Responses vary by state. Many states have laws banning certain type of distractions. Cell phone use has many restrictions, and it depends on each State's law.

8. Are there any federal laws regarding distractions in cars?

No. Those laws fall under the jurisdiction of individual states.